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## The Gay, Lesbian, and Feminist Backlash

The modern era of the gay & lesbian rights movement is usually marked as starting on a hot July evening at the Stonewall Inn in New York City's Greenwich Village. The New York police, as many city police departments across the United States did, made period raids on sexual minority bars to harass and arrest the patrons. On this particular night, transgendered woman, Sylvia Rivera, resisted arrest, touching off a riot that continued for three nights running.

In the next year, three transgendered people, Sylvia Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson, and Angela Keyes Douglas would play pivotal roles in organizing the emergent Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance. The goal of the Gay Liberation Front was complete acceptance of sexual diversity and expression. But by 1971 the gay men's community had returned to the assimilationist strategy as the lesbians, in 1973, turned to separatism and radical feminism. There seemed to be no room for transgendered people in either camp.

In 1971, the GAA wrote and introduced a bill to the New York City Council that was the first omnibus anti-discrimination bill to protect homosexual people. However, inspite of early and avid support of the GAA by transgendered people the bill completely ignored transgendered people. Silvia Rivera, disgusted by the batrayal, said to the leaders of the GAA, "It's not us that they are afraid of — its you! Get rid of us. Sell us out. Make us expendable. Then you're at the front lines. Don't you understand that?" This marked the first serious batrayal, but certainly not the last.

Disillusioned by the GAA's betrayal of transgendered people, Angela Douglas formed the Transsexual Activist Organization along the same lines as the GAA, with some of the loftier ideals of the GLF. She began publishing MoonShadow, a quirky newsletter for and about transgendered people and the struggle for legal rights.

In early 1970's, Beth Elliott was active in a number of organizations including the Alice B. Toklas Gay Democratic Club, which she co-founded, the Board of Directors of the California Committee for Sexual Law Reform working to repeal California's anti-sodomy laws, and the Daughters of Bilitus. The Daughters of Bilitus had been a pioneering lesbian organization during the 1950s and '60s, but was losing membership in the '70s as the lesbian community turned to more radical organizing. In '73 Ms. Elliott was asked to stand for election as the Vice-President of the San Francisco chapter of the Daughters of Bilitus. Late in her term of office her transgender status became a point of contention at the West Coast Lesbian Conference, where she was outed and vilified for being a MTF transsexual. The complaint was that Beth Elliott had insinuated herself into a position of power over women as a patriarchal man, a propagandist ploy that was to become common when attacking other transgendered people . At the conference she was forced to stop her music concert due to the catcalls from the audience by women that knew nothing more about her than that she was transsexual. She was required to sit through a popular vote of the attendees to determine whether they would let her finish her set. In the weeks and months to follow she was further vilified and even betrayed by women who had once called her friend. The treatment she received led her to become "stealth" for many years after.

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In July of 1973, during a “Gay is Good” rally, Sylvia Rivera was followed on the stage by lesbian separatist Jean O’Leary. She denounced transgender people as men who, by “impersonating women”, were exploiting women for profit. It was the beginning of a series of such high profile transphobic attacks from the lesbian community.

In 1977, at the height of the Right Wing / Anita Bryant anti-gay rights backlash, the lesbian feminist separatist movement was busy attacking an even smaller community that only wanted to work within the lesbian community, lesbian identified transsexual women. Central to the conflict in ‘77 was transsexual recording engineer, Sandy Stone, working at Olivia Records.

Sandy Stone was a recording engineer for A&M Records before her transition. Olivia Records needed a recording engineer with skills and experience to help their fledgling all women’s recording studio. They found it in Sandy Stone. She recorded a number of their early albums, training other women on proper recording and mixing technique. When word got around that Olivia had a transsexual in the company, lesbian separatists threatened a boycott of Olivia products and concerts. Olivia Records was on the edge of profitability. A boycott would destroy them. Olivia supported Stone at first but eventually crumpled beneath the separatists demands, asking for Sandy’s resignation.

Angela Douglas became upset at the vitriolic, absurd, and transphobic comments broadcast on listener sponsored station KPFA in Berkeley, California and letters published in the feminist journal Sister. She wrote a very tongue-in-cheek satirical letter to the editor of Sister, the night before the 1977 San Francisco Gay Pride Parade.

The next day, at the Parade, a “gender bending” MTF individual handed out fliers that was written in protest of the Parade Committee’s policy of exclusion of “Drag Queens, Transvestites, and Transsexuals”. The policy was formulated in the hope of heading off the media which tended to focus on the flamboyant, instead of the very serious issues of Gay & Lesbian community pride and efforts to fight homophobia in society. However, transphobia had operated in the Parade Committee to equate transgendered people with “flamboyant” social unacceptability and political liability.

After the parade, Angela Douglas wrote a short essay with photos for the Berkeley Barb, in which she decried the efforts to exclude transgendered people. She asked if there shouldn’t be a counter parade by transgendered people, to be held on Halloween, a day that one is supposed to be flamboyant!

Two years later Janice Raymond in *The Transsexual Empire*, wrote of the events of 1977, casting Ms. Stone as an agent of the “Patriarchy” and “divisive”. The letter that Angela Douglas wrote as satire was quoted out of context, as an example of transsexual hatred of women, by Raymond. Her quoting out of context a letter written by Douglas was tantamount to intellectual dishonesty, with scholarly repercussions.

Janice Raymond was a professor at the University of Massachusetts. She is infamous for having written her doctoral thesis attacking transsexuality, denying its medical reality, and for viciously attacking individual transsexuals, notably Sandy Stone and Angela Keyes Douglas in her book, based on her dissertation. The book uses insensitive and transphobic language throughout, while vilifying feminine MTF transsexuals as tools of patriarchy for upholding stereotypes of women, and vilifying androgynous lesbian identified MTF transsexuals for being

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tools of patriarchy, fifth columnists infiltrating womens' space and "raping womens' bodies", a typical 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' trap. She dismisses FTM transsexuals as deluded and misguided lesbians, afraid of the label "homosexual". Her thesis rests entirely on arguments that sex/gender identity are fixed within the genitals at birth, an essentialist theory that excludes the possibility of transsexuals being a form of intersex, a topic which Raymond never addresses.

The book, while it did not create the transphobic attitude in the lesbian community, did tap into and 'validated', at least for the transphobes themselves, the discrimination they practiced. Thus, what began in the '70s, occasional attacks on individual transsexual women, became institutionalized discrimination against all transsexuals in the '80s.

The Transsexual Empire, was not the most damaging writing that Raymond penned. Far worse was a United States federal government commissioned study in the early 1980's on the topic of federal aid for transsexual people seeking rehabilitation and health services. This paper, not well publicized, effectively eliminated federal and some states aid for indigent and imprisoned transsexuals. It had a further impact on private health insurance which followed the federal government's lead in disallowing services to transsexual patients for any treatment remotely related to being transsexual, including breast cancer or genital cancer, as that was deemed to be a consequence of treatment for transsexuality.

Ms. Raymond is closely associated with another noted transphobic writer, Mary Daly, who described transsexuals as "Frankenstein's Monsters" in her book GynEcology.

Transgender participation continued to be controversial in the Gay & Lesbian Community. Transsexuals taking leadership positions in the community were especially subject to attack.

Ms. Carol Katz was on the Christopher Street West Gay Pride Parade and Festival Committee, serving as Security Coordinator from '79 through '81. However her position on the board was a controversial one as many gays and especially lesbians objected to the presence of a transsexual. She recruited a number of transgendered people, both FTM and FTM to work as volunteer parade monitors and festival security each year . Her background in law enforcement facilitated greater cooperation between the Committee and local law enforcement organizations, LAPD and the LA County Sheriff's Department.

In 1980 Ms. Katz was asked to serve as Security Co-ordinator for the "Women Take Back The Night March" in Hollywood. She agreed to help. However... lesbian feminist separatists threatened to boycott the march. Carol offered to step down in the interests of the larger community, with some private bitterness. The Committee accepted her resignation. But at the very last minute, due to overwhelming details in doing the job without her... and perhaps a realization that it was wrong to push her out of her participation... the committee asked her to take back the job the very day of the march. The controversy over Ms. Katz's leadership role lead to the effective banning of broad transgender community participation in event planning and execution, though transgendered people did march that night .

It should be noted that the memory of the gay & lesbian community is short, as demonstrated by the efforts of the transgender community in Los Angeles to win inclusion in the Parade and Festival in 1995; Transman, Jacob Hale faced a Festival committee that believed transgendered people had never been participants before. The work of the transgendered community in

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'79-'81 had been completely forgotten, erased by the silence of the 1980's.

In 1991 Nancy Burkholter was ejected from the Michigan Wymyns' Music Festival at 1:00am by security staff suspicious that she was transsexual. She had done nothing to warrant eviction. She was forced to find transportation back to town to fly home, a holiday trip ruined by transphobia.

Unknown to the transsexuals who had been quietly attending the festival for years was an unpublished policy of the festival organizers that transsexuals were not welcome "on the land". The policy was written out in the material for the next year that only "Wymyn Born Wymyn" may attend. The language was clearly designed to exclude transsexuals while avoiding debates regarding whether MTF transsexuals were "Wymyn".

The next year, in 1992 TransActivist Anne Ogborn began organizing a protest to be held at the Festival, unable to go herself, she enlisted Davina Anne Gabrielle to attend. Davina and non-transsexual woman, Janis Hollingsworth handed-out buttons to women reading "I might be transsexual" at a table to enlist festival attendees in a dialog over the transsexual inclusion. Davina was ejected from "the land" in accordance with the written policy.

In 1993, the transgender community pitched CampTrans outside the main entrance. Jessica Xavier, Leslie Feinberg, among others attended to protest the Festivals' "Wymyn Born Wymyn Only" policy. "Woman Born Transsexual" read a new button worn by CampTrans inmates. At the camp, workshops and concerts were presented as an alternative to the Festival. A number of women came out of the festival to participate in discussions. Notable was the participation of younger lesbians, especially members of The Lesbian Avengers. TransActivist volunteers stood outside the gate taking a poll of the festival attendees attitudes toward transsexual inclusion at the festival. The poll revealed division on the issue, but the majority of the women attending indicated that they would welcome transsexual women.

Participation in CampTrans energized the transgender community to become active once again, after the community's silent withdrawal from the larger gay & lesbian community the previous decade.

National and local transgender activist worked for months to gain inclusion in the 1993 March On Washington. Transgender volunteers aiding in organizing the March, notably Jessica Xavier, worked with March organizers for months trying to gain inclusion in the name of the March. There was a 'divide and conquer' politicking by transphobic gays & lesbians that pitted bisexuals against transgenders. They told the bisexual community members who were also working toward official inclusion that it was either transgender or bisexual, but not both. To their credit the bisexual members did not buy into the ploy. However, the issue of inclusion was still couched in such terms by the foes of transgender inclusion. When the issue was put to a vote by the organizing committee the bisexuals won inclusion easily. The vote for inclusion of transgender was divided. There were actual cheers from the gay and lesbian community when the committee announced their decision to exclude transgender which deeply dismayed the transgender community volunteers.

A new pattern emerged in the mid 1990's. The generation that had grown up since Stonewall welcomed transgender people without reservation, perhaps even with a tinge of adulation for their contribution to the struggle for Queer Rights. The older generation, those who had

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struggled just after stonewall, those who had read *The Transsexual Empire* when it was new, had not changed their minds significantly. Those that had been accepting during the 1970s remained so, those that had been sitting on the fence now came down on transgender inclusion. But those who had adamantly opposed trans-inclusion in the '70s still fought against it in the '90s. In 1994 *The Transsexual Empire* was reprinted and used as a textbook in feminist classes once again.

In 1994 CampTrans was pitched again with Riki Anne Wilchins taking a leading role. The turnout was smaller than expected. It was not due to a feeling of failure, but rather a feeling that the issue of transgender inclusion in "wymyn only space" was being by-passed by larger and more important issues.

Also occurring in 1994 was the Gay Games. When transgendered people wished to participate they discovered similar transphobic attitudes that the International Olympic Committee held. The Games organizers refused to allow transgendered people to participate except under very restrictive rules, namely that had to prove that they had had surgery or at least lived two years full time, with hormones, in their gender of identity. Bi-gendered individuals were completely excluded. This reliance on rules that on the surface seem to come direct from the HBGDA Standards of Care, offended the transgendered community.

Transsexual Menace of New York organized to protest the restrictive and discriminatory rules. In street protests the group held up a banner that read, "Gay Games to transgendered: DROP DEAD!!" The uproar and embarrassment forced the organizers to drop the rules and allow unrestricted participation.

Some gay columnists were calling the events the "transgender Stonewall", comparing 1994's protests to 'the gay riots of 1969', totally ignoring the historic irony that Stonewall itself was started and fought by transgendered people. This lack of historic recognition sparked another protest in New York, demanding inclusion in planned events to mark 25 years since Stonewall.

In 1994 the issue of discrimination against sexual minorities became the biggest issue. The gay & lesbian community was working towards passing a bill in Congress, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA);. Transgender activists worked with the gay & lesbian community and the bill's sponsors in Congress on inclusive language for the bill, only to discover that the language was removed before the bill was introduced. When the issue was researched by Phyllis Frye, she discovered that the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) had objected to the language. Once again transphobia in the gay community had resurfaced as betrayal.

The betrayal of the HRC was echoed at the local level. In 1995, transactivists in Oregon worked with gay & lesbian activist with the Right To Privacy Political Action Committee (RTP) for a state version of ENDA. Once again language was changed at the last minute, behind the back of the [transgender](#) community. Later, RTP board members denied this fact when charged by transactivists. However, transsexual law student and legislative intern, JoAnna McNamara was in the meetings that were held with RTP and the bill's sponcors. RTP representatives did not know that Ms. McNamara was transsexual, who later provided information to the local gay press regarding the betrayal.

The transgender community lobbied the HRC and other organizations to amend the language to include transgender and gender variant [gay & lesbian](#) protection. Each year saw organizations

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that had previously supported the bill, drop its support. Each year of the second half of the '90s saw organizations officially add transgender to their mission statement. Each year saw what started as inclusive lip service become real support.

In 1998, the Gay Games was held in the Netherlands. Ironically, while transsexual pop singing star Dana International performed at the opening festivities, the transgender community protested the re-instatement of the same restrictive rules that had excluded some transgendered people in New York four years earlier. However, European officials of the Games were unmoved.

In 1999, five years after the disagreement between the HRC and the transgender community over inclusion in ENDA surfaced the controversy continued, one of the bill's Congressional sponsors, openly gay Representative, Barney Frank, played the "Bathroom Card", saying that employers will not accept transgender people as employees since they won't be able to convince their other employees to tolerate transgender people in the restrooms. This was quickly denounced by transgender activists as truly expressing transphobia, though Frank had earlier voiced his concern regarding violence and discrimination against transgender people in the wake of the death of Tyra Hunter, pointing out the irony as the "Shower Card" was used against the gay & lesbian community in its fight to gain the right to serve in the armed forces earlier in the decade .

In 1999, at the close of the 20th Century, the gay & lesbian community was still divided over transgender inclusion. Camp Trans was once again pitched in front of the gate of the Michigan Wommin's Music Festival. This time post operative male to female transsexuals were allowed 'on the land', but pre-operative MTF women and post-operative FTM men were not. The issue had now come down to possession of a penis. Although they were now allowed on the land, vocal transphobic lesbian separatists menaced [transsexual](#) women, while members of The Lesbian Avengers supported them.

At the end of the 20th Century, the Transgender Question in the gay and lesbian community was still unsettled, and unsettling for the majority.

*[transhistory.org/history/TH\\_Backlash.html](http://transhistory.org/history/TH_Backlash.html) - 2003*